My History: Keijiro Umebayashi

I was born in Waimanalo on July 6, 1919. My parents were Usuke Umebayashi and Saki Masuda. They were both from Yamaguchi prefecture which is in the southern Honshu island of Japan. Usuke was the son of Kisuke who was a fisherman in the coastal village called Sagamura which faces the Inland Sea.

Today Sagamura remains a small town with offshore islands forming a protective bay. Closer to shore, a stone breakwater shields a modest commercial fishing fleet. During the day, the men are mostly gone out to the bay and beyond looking for sea life that they will bring back to sell. There is a road above the village that carries the buses that serve the town. Above the road is an elementary school and above that is a hill with a park on top. From the park, one has a sweeping view of the village below and ocean that sustains it. The town is so small it doesn't even have a store, just a gas station on the way out heading west. The workers at the station confirm that there are Umebayashis in town. Between the road and village are a few rice paddies which provide the basic nutrition that complements the seafood. In one yard is a metal frame with nylon netting holding fish that has been split and drying in the sun. This is one of Japan's most ancient way of preserving food. With rice, preserved fish and pickled vegetables, when the weather gets too bad to go out, there will be food to carry them through the winter.

Usuke was one of eleven children in the Umebayashi family in Sagamura. As he was not the eldest son, he was not obligated to take care of the parents and so he signed a contract for five years labor in Hawaii. The economy in southern Japan was not good and taxes were being raised so many families struggled during this period. Usuke must have found an opportunity to help out the family when he entered into this contract. What he didn't know was that he would never return back to Japan, his village or his family again. He would start a new family in the islands two thousand miles to the east and with a picture bride.

The earliest thing I can remember is when I was about 10 years old and we lived in Kahaluu[1] by the bridge over the stream along the highway. The stream empties out into Kaneohe Bay and one day we decided to plant two trees on the ocean side of the road, Kahuku side of Kahaluu Stream. There is a park there now. The trees were an iron wood and a fig tree. The fig tree turned out to be a banyan with no figs at all. Actually, they are in the same family but bear no edible fruit. I wonder if they are still there now, they would be large and about 80 years old.

I lived in Kahaluu near where Kahaluu Regional Park is now. It was a two room bungalow with a kitchen and sleeping area. The outside was a dark green stain that still showed the wood grain. The house was built on a wood foundation above the ground to account for termites and flooding. The floor in the house was wood covered with tatami similar to beach mats. This meant all shoes or slippers were taken off before entering.

[1] Located on eastern shore of the island of Oahu.

The house was on the *makai*[2] side of Kam Hwy up the driveway parallel to the stream. The wall slats were vertical and made of wood 1x12 dimension. It was the board and batten style common to the era. The bathroom was outside like an outhouse. The bathing was done in a *furo*[3] room attached but separate from the house. No showers existed but you had to clean up before entering the bath. The custom was the eldest bathed first and then down the line to the younger family members. The room was corrugated sheet metal and the original way of getting water was to use rain that fell on the roof, into a gutter and finally a wooden barrel. The barrels in those days were originally from shoyu, sake or miso tubs and recycled from the store. The kitchen had a cast iron enamel sink about five feet long and white. No running water, so vegetables were washed outside. No electricity so the kerosene lantern or two were used for lights. Even though there was no power, we had an ice box which held a block which would last a couple of days. Usually didn't have leftovers and food was bought daily from the nearby Hygenic Store. Dried food and salted food such as salmon and pork kept well and were more commonly used.

I remember seeing the bridge being built over Kahaluu Stream when I was about 5 or 6 years old. They were pouring concrete for the spans. The footling [sic] had been done and they were using mixers, no concrete trucks were used. After the pour, burlap bags were moistened and the wet bags were laid over the cement to keep [sic] allow it to cure properly and not crack.

I remember when I was 7 or 8 years old and a well was being drilled on the Kahuku[4] side of the stream *makai* side of the road. I remember seeing water streaming up in the air about 20 feet so they must have hit fresh H2O. I drank from that well, it was open to the public. There was a 2-1/2 inch steel pipe two feet high that flowed cool clean water constantly and this was used by 2-3 nearby houses.

The school I went to was Waiahole Elementary in the back of the valley. In the morning, I would wake up at 6:00am and eat breakfast (no cafeteria at school). I would get a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at the store for lunch. At 10 cents that was a cheap lunch, candy bars were 5 cents. I went there from kindergarten where all the kids walked to class. I had older brothers and sisters. All six of us walked up the road together in the morning. Classes started at 8:00 so we got an hour head start because it took almost an hour to get there. Most of the children attending the school walked, only the store's son had enough money to buy a bicycle. After a few classes, there was a half hour lunch which we ate inside the classroom. This was a country school in which the teachers lived in teacher's cottages. Most of them were single and went back to their cottages for lunch. For bathroom breaks there were only one or two buildings with 8-9 total rooms with no bathrooms. They were in a separate building with only one side for the girls and one for the boys. The toilets were the old fashioned ones with high up in the air which the water was gravity fed to the bowls. After lunch there were a couple of classes, then school was out at 2:00pm. Then we walked back out of the valley to a Methodist church for Japanese

[2] Makai is a Hawaiian word meaning "towards the sea." In the context of giving directions, it means the ocean side of the road.
[3] Furo is a Japanese word for a short, deep bathtub, traditionally made of wood.
[4] Kahuku was a community further north of Kahaluu.

language lessons. These lasted from 3:00-5:00pm. I got up to 5th grade level in the language, after that you had to take lessons in town (Honolulu).

At age 13 I had finished 8th grade and since there was no intermediate or high school on the windward side, I went to Central Intermediate. I left home about 7:00am and took a taxi to town. There was no taxi stand, so we waited on Kam Highway to be picked up. The car was like a station wagon so by the time he was ready to leave for town, there were 8 passengers. Some were adults going over for shopping, my dad would go about once a month. We paid by the month and the total cost was $3.00, gas was 10 cents a gallon. My sister Vivian was working as a maid, living there and attending McKinley High School. The eldest sister Takayo was sick with TB and stayed at home. Matsuyo also worked as a maid, got married and neither attended high school.

Takeo and Minoru did not go to intermediate or high school and went to work instead. Takeo was working construction as a heavy equipment operator and Minoru went to work on Coconut Island. The both of them did WPA work during the Roosevelt administration before the construction work and duties on Coconut Island. Just before the war, construction activity was high with work going on to build up Hickam runways and housing and Kaneohe Marine Corps Station. Since I was the youngest, the other children had left home and were working so I was told by my father that he would support me through high school. Takeo worked for a while in central California on a lettuce farm. The grocery store in Kahaluu had a son who knew someone in the Imperial Valley that had a farm which needed help. So he left for a couple of years but finally came back as the owners ran into some hard times and couldn't pay the workers.

I was only at Central Intermediate for 9th grade then went to McKinley for 10-12th grade. At Central all the kids from the windward side went there. All the students from the leeward side went to Kalakaua. While attending, I learned basketball since the elementary school only had a volleyball court. When someone passed the ball to me the call was: "Let him shoot!" because the other kids knew I was new to the game and needed practice.

During classes we changed rooms for different classes. Most of the elementary and intermediate teachers were female. During my graduation, we all sat on the steps for a class photo and later we were given a certificate. Most of the kids in the picture were townies, maybe 5-10 per cent were from the windward side. Also there was a rule that said that if you hadn't finished 6th grade by the time you were 16, you were ejected from school. Some Hawaiian students took a grade level 3-4 years but they could not stay in school indefinitely due to that rule.

When I was 16, I attended McKinley High School. I was still commuting from the windward side but I didn't have to worry about buying lunch at our old store before heading over to the other side. I left about 7:30 -8:00am because the classes started a little later. For lunch we would eat lunch at the cafeteria but the lines could be long so sometimes we would go across the street. There was a small two story building with a diner downstairs and living quarters upstairs. It was a small take out window with choices, mostly plate lunches. The plate would have a bed of rice, macaroni or potato

salad and meat. My favorite was sweet sour spare ribs though you could order beef stew or spaghetti with meat balls. The cost was 30 cents for a meal which was about the same at the cafeteria. The cafeteria had more balanced meals but had long lines and the take out window had fast service. They had benches on the side where we ate but if those were full, the grass and trees at McKinley were good locations as well. We enjoyed those meals since we didn't have that kind of food at home.

After school, I walked across King Street, through Thomas Square and to Young Street to Pauahi where the taxi waited for us and the ride across the Koolaus[5]. Class got out about 2:00pm and the taxi left town at 4:00pm.

Later my sister Vivian got married and was renting a very small house at Austin Lane in Palama. In the eleventh grade, I could go stay at her place instead of going back to Kahaluu. She lived above a flower shop with her husband Harry, a taxi driver. Vivian worked as a house maid in Manoa and later worked for a colonel in Ft. Shafter.

Later when I got out of the army, I helped her buy a house in Palolo through the GI bill. Richard was born before the war and the house they were living in was just too small. Through the GI bill loans were easier to get so I got an $11,000 loan which at that time was enough to purchase the house and lot for them. My name was on the property but they made the payments. It was a brand new house built for veterans designed by Alfred Preiss. The development was built on the old Palolo Dairy and included sidewalks, roads and sewers. On the Kaimuki side of the property is Palolo Stream.

The most famous person I met in high school was Shiro Matsuo who has his famous saimin stands now. Shiro's father owned the Nippon Theater which only showed Japanese movies. Shiro also attended McKinley High School and we walked together back to Palama. Shiro was in the army with me and the noodle empire started after the war. He loved poetry and playing the ukulele after school.

The high schools were somewhat divided along ethnic lines. There was Kamehameha for the Hawaiians, Punahou for the haoles[6], St. Louis for the Portuguese who were Catholics, McKinley or Mid Pac for the Japanese and Iolani was for the more well off Chinese students. Football practices were in the field which faces Kapiolani Boulevard. The actual games were played in the old Honolulu Stadium which was in Moiliili. McKinley played Kamehameha, St. Louis, Punahou and Iolani. Since the school was mostly Asian and of smaller stature, usually Kamehameha or Punahou won those games. Wally Yonamine was one of the few Asian players who did well and played for Farrington. He was fast and athletic so he was a combination quarterback, running back and kicker. Later, he was a referee for the professional wrestling matches on TV and in the Civic Auditorium.

While in high school ROTC was required so we had practices after school. Two years was mandatory though I was in there for 1 year. For health reasons, I was removed the

[5] Mountain range.
[6] In Hawaii, it was a Hawaiian word used to describe Caucasian people.

second year due to a positive TB test. During practice we did marching, rifle practice and other military duties. It was one hour every day after school five days a week. During parades like on Veterans' Day we marched in uniform. Later the practices served me well during my military service.

I graduated from McKinley in 1938 when I was 18. I worked for 4 years: 3 years on Coconut Island as time keeper and doing inventory in the warehouse for Christian Holmes, worked at the State Hospital as a mess boy delivering food to the wards, Grace Brothers Hawaiian Bitumulls paving blacktop at Hickam housing, Kaneohe Marine Corps Station airfield and roads. One summer I even worked at Libby Cannery in Iwilei putting pineapples in the hopper.

Fishing tales: When I was 13-14 years old, after school, weekends or summer vacation, I was on the water fishing. I would to into [sic] the mountains and cut a bamboo stalk for a fishing pole. I had no money so if you wanted to do something, you had to be creative. The general store had everything. It was called Kanemaru Store in Kahaluu on Kam Highway next to the bridge. They owned the store and houses nearby which they rented out. In that store we would ask for *sugi* (fishing line), weights and hooks which were available in different sizes. The best place was Kaneohe Bay which was full of mullet, aholehole, moi, oopu (after big rains), papio and ooama. Some of these like ooama and papio were seasonal and only came around in May to July. We would get black shrimp which you caught near river mouths. We were on the shore and would cast into the bay. A middle aged Hawaiian man had a boat and would take me on the boat to the reef so we could catch hinalea, koli, humuhumunukunukuapuaa, yellow tangs, pulau, eels, stick fish, kala, aweoweo, kumu and veke. This guy fished to feed his family and never sold the catch. We would go out on low tide and wait for tide to rise. When the tide came up so would the fish. We would go out for hours and only in the daytime.

My father had a 14 foot fishing boat made of redwood. There were Japanese fishermen on the windward side who would bring the wood over from town and build it. They were fishermen who built their own boats using redwood which would take the sea water without rotting and brass screws. The construction often took place near Kaneohe Bay. Although shore fishing was a favorite of mine, the boat fishing was different. My father would lay nets on low tide, leave them overnight and pick up the catch. If you waited too long sharks and crabs would take your catch. We also made fish traps out of rebar and chicken wire. We would catch eel, crab, lobster and octopus. The bait in the traps was usually a dead fish. Moray and white eels were caught because a trap laid near their hole enticed them to come out. A good working knowledge of the underwater terrain gave you the place to lay a trap depending on what you were fishing for. A fishing net laid across the river would yield mullet and aholehole. This all came to an end when the war started. All boats were forbidden to go out to sea due to martial law. Troops were stationed along the shore around the whole island. In fact when I was in the military later, I was stationed to shore watch and our section was from Heeia to Kualoa.

On November 14, 1941, I was drafted into the US Army, 25th Division. It was the 4th draft with the first one starting in 1940. In a few weeks the war would start and I would

witness it first hand. After I was drafted, I was sent to Schofield Barracks for basic training. I was put on the train that went from Iwilet to Schofield where we were housed in tents. Since we were in basic training we got that kind of housing and the ones who passed were in the barracks. Each camp had portable showers and toilets so we cleaned up there. There were at least 500 [sic] -100 people in a tent city with 8 to a tent. We didn't have to sleep on the ground though. We each had a cot and either a foot locker or a stand up locker for clothes. We were issued a couple of field and dress uniforms and laundry was done once a week.

During basic we got up at 6:00am in the morning for breakfast, roll call, calisthenics, drills like marching, rifle training, hiking with full packs and rifle for 1-5 miles. We ate in pyramid shaped mess tents 3 meals a day. If you didn't like the offering you could go to the Post Exchange but it was at your cost. There was never rice served so you had to get used to the army style of meals. In the field you had a mess kit which was a metal container divided in two and a knife, fork and spoon. On base you had regular plates to eat on. In the field you had a dry food which was biscuits, canned meat, candy bar, cigarettes and toilet paper. There were three types: a breakfast, lunch and dinner type. The breakfast type was a ham patty, powered coffee, cocoa and juice. Spam, beef stew or ham and cheese was typically in the dinner pack. The meals came in a compact cardboard box with concentrated calories.

On June 10, Washington had decided that the ground forces had to be ready by September 30 of 1942. Three training posts were suggested for the unit in Hawaii: Guernsey in Wyoming, Leonard Wood in Mississippi and McCoy in Wisconsin. Army Ground Forces chose McCoy. On June 10, the 2nd Army and Central Defense Command were ordered to organize, equip and train an infantry combat battalion. (Ambassadors in Arms, p.73)

We took the SS Maui from Honolulu Harbor on June 12[7], 1942 and landed in Oakland, California a week later. From there we took a train which left at night in secrecy. From California it went through Nevada and through the Midwest to Wisconsin. The windows were blacked out due to anti-Japanese sentiment in some parts of the country. We slept in sleeping berths on cars, two to a side. We didn't use the dining cars and ate standard rations from the army. In the back of the train on the last car were the bathrooms and when I looked, there was no water. Whatever was deposited in the toilet went straight to the tracks. There were no showers. We traveled non-stop and even through the night. The only short stops were to refill water for the steam engine. In a couple of days we got there in the evening.

They were still building the barracks so we got quarters in tents. There were 8 men to a tent with slightly raised cement slabs and cots. I think there were foot lockers for our stuff at the front of the bed. Dirty clothes were put into a duffel bag which got washed once a week. We had to pay for laundry service which came to 1 or 2 dollars a month. We got paid $21.00 a month during training and $30.00 post training. There was a stove

[7] Date of departure for the Hawaiian Provisional Infantry Battalion was June 5. After landing in Oakland, its name was changed to the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate).

in the middle which burned wood. Whenever the wood ran out we got more from headquarters. Even in summer, the nights were cool so we used it to warm the tent. The stove had a secondary purpose. When we got rations, it was a convenient place to heat up the food.

The purpose of the training was to expose warm weather recruits to cold weather training in the woods. We started with overnights and progressed to a week at a time. The mess hall traveled with us and the cooks prepared food in the field for their training as well. We were in winter conditions but we had hot meals which we were grateful for. We got up at 6:00am, breakfast was 6:30am and training commenced at 7:00am. Lunch was 11:30am -12:00pm. More training was scheduled after lunch until about 4 or 4:30 and dinner was at 6:00pm. We always felt like we had enough food but some enterprising soldiers took upon themselves to hunt in the forest for squirrels, rabbits, armadillos which became extra meals. We had no ammunition as it was purely maneuvers so all the animals were caught by hand.

On January 6th we left by train at night for Mississippi. The trains were used for freight during the day and we got use of it in the evening. In about a day or two we got there at night. We were glad to see that we got barracks instead of tents.

I spent most of 1943 training on the mainland in Camp Shelby, Mississippi which is on the border next to Louisiana. During this training, we skipped basic training as we had already done that in ROTC. We had D series battalion maneuvers where we learned tactics to outfox the enemy. There were day exercises and even night maneuvers. By the time we were deployed we knew how to find each other at the dead of night by voice or shape. The technique was to stay close to each other so as not to get lost or separated from our squads. We could speak in Japanese to each other which annoyed the other Americans who didn't understand a word. By late July we got the order to ship to the European theater but we would have a slight detour first.

In November 1942, Operation Torch was in full swing with thousands of men invading North Africa which was to be the first part of the European invasion starting with Italy. We left Camp Shelby[8] and were sent by train to Kilmer, New Jersey where we took a ship convoy to Oran, Algeria[9]. This had been secured by the Allies and we were readied to invade Italy. The invasion of Sicily had begun but they had reached a stalemate so we were sent as reinforcements. While the enemy was occupied with that, we leap frogged to Salerno which is north of Sicily. By the time we got there, the war in Africa was done. Salerno had sandy beaches which we invaded[10].

We got off the troop ships on cargo nets to Higgins boats. Unlike LSTs we had an overhead cover which protected us from bullets. Coast guard crews operated the boats which could hold 40 soldiers. Like the LSTs[11], there was a ramp which lowered when

[8] Departed on August 11, 1943.
[9] Arrived on September 2, 1943.
[10] Landed on beaches of Salerno September 22, 1943.
[11] Landing Ship Tanks

you reached the shore. While we were loading the Higgins boats, we circled until there were enough to go, about 10 boats. It was a smooth ride in and took about 10 minutes. Salerno had a bay which we got into, the invasion had secured the beach and we had no resistance. On that day about a thousand people landed, a regiment in size. I was in the 34th division which had 3 regiments, and 3 battalions in each which had the 100th which I was in. Each battalion has 3 companies, and I was in B or Baker Company. The company letters in our regiment went from A to L. There are 4 platoons per company and I was in 2nd platoon. There are 3 squads in one platoon, each having 12 men and I was in 2nd squad.

By the time Cassino had run itself out, we were so battered the replacements came in from the 442nd into the 100th Battalion. For those who had volunteered after the war began and were Japanese Americans they would join the 442 in Hawaii and meet up with others like them in the 100th Battalion in Italy and later France.

In May the war ended for the Germans and in August, the Japanese surrendered. By 1945, I found out I could go home because you were given points for each campaign and I had enough so I could leave. In May 1945 we were in France guarding a prison of war camp when the war ended with Germany. By August I had orders to go back to Hawaii for non-combat duty. I had left France to England, then Scotland, then Iceland to Newfoundland all by boat. From Newfoundland to LaGuardia Airport where we were put on a train to Sacramento. From Sacramento we left on a river to the ocean where we went north to Portland, Oregon. From Oregon I was on the boat heading back to Hawaii when we heard the news. Japan had surrendered and the war was over. On the way back the ship began to run low of supplies so we had to eat pickled pigs feet. To this day, I can't eat that stuff anymore.

Ken Kaneko story:
This is how I remembered it. As a side story, we were in Italy before Cassino and moving forward in flat country in a wheat field and saw a wire on the ground. It was brown and looked suspicious so one of the squad members cut the wire with his pocket knife. It was a twisted wire along a road and in less than an hour a German soldier came up looking for damaged wire. We were in the back of their lines so he didn't expect to see us. They usually had artillery observers who looked for spots to hit. They would send a smoke charge and with binoculars make the corrections and send the information to the ones with cannons. After the combat was over and the place was secure, the wires were put on poles instead of the ground. On the poles they were just too obvious and easily spotted.

There were four instances of men who acted oddly before they were killed. They seemed to have a sense of what was to come. In one instance, we were going up a road by Anzio to secure it and found an empty house. We took it over and there was a guy who wasn't part of our unit but was afraid of being killed. We let him stay for the night and he wouldn't sleep in the floor with the rest of us. He insisted on sleeping in an outside brick oven that was used to bake bread. There were wheat fields around so bread must have been an important source of food. The artillery was usually in the mountains and they must have spotted us because soon the mortar shells started coming in. The barrage

didn't last long but sure enough the guy who was most afraid of being hit was killed when a shell hit the brick oven he felt most safe in. After the shelling was over we did a head count and he was not accounted for. One of the other guys started looking around and found him under some loose bricks.

In Italy, our platoon sergeant Masaru[12] Takeba was wandering around in a daze so I asked him how he was doing. He said he wasn't feeling well, so I sent him to a first aid station. Then a little while later a shell hit him. Sometime just before people die, they are not themselves and in this case he was not acting normally. It had quieted down so he had not been injured as far as I could see.

In France we had a haole platoon leader, second lieutenant James Broody[13] who was also wandering around looking at a map. I went up to him and asked him where we were. He did not give me an answer and seemed to be in a daze. I left him and later I heard he had been killed. Someone found a map, showed it to me and asked me if it was mine. By the markings on the map I could tell it was the lieutenant's and gave it back. He was an intelligence officer and had notes and marks to show where the enemy was and take it back to company headquarters so they knew what was happening up front.

In Camp McCoy we were there in summer and it was for winter training. We would go out in the fields and sleep in cold weather. We stayed there for one winter. They issued us heavy trench coats, long johns, wool socks, wool head covering, wool gloves and canvas pup tent. Each person carried one half of a tent so two people could form a complete shelter. We ate cold rations out in the field, there was canned heat to warm it up if allowed. Sometimes we were out in the field for a week. On maneuvers we stayed for one month and even bathed in portable showers or even the rivers if it was not winter.

The last instance is in the book where a friend gave me his stuff and we were new to battle and hadn't experienced it yet. That was to change but one of them gave me his stuff because he didn't believe he would make it. We didn't understand because no one had been exposed to live fire yet. However, a short time later, he died when his head was blown off from a shell.

By October 1944, we left Italy via boat and landed in Marseille, France. From there we were sent north to Bruyeres to participate in the Rhineland campaign. In June 1944 the Normandy invasion had succeeded in driving the Germans eastward to the Vosges mountains on the border of France and Germany. Some four months later we were to be part of the final push into Germany which was expected to end the war. At the same time the Russians were pushing from the east and taking many of the best German soldiers in the process. The Germans we encountered seemed to be comprised of some older men and young men many of which were not as experienced and dedicated to fighting. This made some of them give up easier.

---

[12] Masaharu
[13] Boodry

We were to take the hills and spent much of my time fighting there so I didn't actually visit the town of Bruyeres. In the hills, there were thick forests in which seeing the enemy was sometimes a problem. When there was no fighting, we supplemented our diet with shiitake mushrooms we found on dead branches.

After Bruyeres was taken, we took a short break and then we were sent into the thick of battle to save the lost battalion in the battle for Biffontaine. The 141st had pushed too far ahead of their supplies and support. In normal battle strategy you were supposed to keep touch with your buddies on each side as well. It seemed the 141st did neither and the Germans closed behind them in a pincer movement. I was in that battle to rescue them but was injured in a mortar blast that got a metal fragment embedded in my ankle. So I wasn't there when the Nisei broke through but heard about it in the hospital. So for me the war ended on October 30, 1944. After my second wound I was send to safer duties guarding prisoners of war. I had participated in 4 major campaigns and had earned enough points to be sent home.